

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 201

FL 016 183

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 TITLE Multi-Purpose English Class: A Workshop on the Use of Literary Works of Art on Student-Centred Principles.
 PUB DATE Jul 84
 NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Osaka Area Mini Conference of the Japan Association of Language Teachers (Osaka, Japan, July 1984).
 PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
 -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
 EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS College Students; *English (Second Language); *English Literature; Essays; Foreign Countries; Grammar; Higher Education; Japanese; *Literature Appreciation; Reading Instruction; Second Language Instruction; *Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Role; Translation; Writing Instruction
 IDENTIFIERS Alicias Diary (Hardy); Japan

ABSTRACT

This workshop text encourages the use of literature in a student-centered curriculum of English as a second language (ESL). The first section discusses the role of the teacher in the student-centered approach and outlines the reasons for using English-language literature in the Japanese university ESL course. The second section emphasizes the usefulness of literature for a variety of purposes, and describes activities and exercises for reading comprehension, translation, perusal or attentive reading, grammar instruction, and essay writing. The exercises are all based on a portion of Thomas Hardy's "Alicia's Diary," and focus on typical aspects and problems of ESL instruction to native Japanese speakers. (MSE)

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Multi-Purpose English Class:
A Workshop on the Use of Literary Works of Art
on Student-Centred Principles

By

Isao S. Uemichi

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MULTI-PURPOSE ENGLISH CLASS:

A Workshop on the Use of Literary Works of Art
on Student-Centred Principles

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I. Teacher's Role in the Student-Centred Class

(1) How Important Teacher Is in Student-Centred Class

In the student-centred class the role of the teacher is more important than in the ordinary class conducted by the teacher who is responsible for it. For, unless under strict control, it will go astray and chaotic, as every student will go after his/her desire. It is only the teacher who knows what end to achieve. It therefore depends mostly on the ability of the teacher how much a class will succeed, but in the student-centred class this is particularly so.

(2) Student-Centred Principles

There are many ways towards the 'student-centred class', but in my opinion the point is that it is the class in which the teacher will teach no more or less than what his/her students want to learn. If

the students want to learn grammar, the teacher will help them to learn it, but *never force them to learn anything else*. If students want to learn nothing in particular, in an extreme case, as often in the class of the Japanese university, the teacher must find out as soon as possible what will suit them and teach that to them. For that purpose the teacher may have a discussion with the students and thus make them realise what they really want to learn. It is for this task that the teacher must be talented and, in fact, demanded most earnestly.

In order to put the 'student-centred class' under strict control, it is recommendable that the teacher should prepare the seating assignment, before the semester starts or on the earliest possible occasion after that. The teacher can, then, see who sits where, what a certain student is doing and can thus evaluate any and all the time his/her participation in, or commitment with, the class, preparation, ability, general attitude, etc. To facilitate your evaluation, you must also invent many abbreviations to use on the seating assignment, e.g. GR for Good Reading, VP for Very Poor (in Achievement, preparation, presentation, etc.), NS for No Solution, T for Talkative, etc. It is wise, for you, to enumerate some of them at the top of the seating assignment for your constant reference. These preparations, however trivial they may look outside, will prove in the classroom how talented and efficient you look as a teacher.

(3) Why Literary Works of Art

In Japanese universities the majority of students are mature both intellectually and emotionally, however unlikely they may look to European and American teachers. Many texts used in universities today are, therefore, too easy or too childish for them. This is why they lose interest in not only their texts but also even English, though this aspect has often been overlooked or misunderstood. It is *not because your students do not understand the text* that they cannot speak well about it. In spite of this fact, some teachers tend to use still easier texts in universities, simply because their students cannot apparently respond so much as they expect them. They thus make more students disappointed with teachers, texts and English again. They have to talk with their students over what they really want to learn. If it is what you are incapable of teaching that your students want to learn, you must acknowledge, before you criticise their spitefulness and trickiness, that you are not qualified for the teacher of that class. Today students' demands are versatile. It should always be necessary, however, that teachers should also be provided with the alternatives. If you cannot meet your students' demand, it may be one of the solutions that you will tell them what you really want to teach them as a teacher. Students may be interested in it.

The best texts I should suggest for university students, whatever courses they may be in, will be good literary works of art, possibly in modern times. They need not be in prose, if we use some criticisms of them together, but works in prose may be better for ordinary classes. Good literary works of art are at once beautiful in style and structure. They also have such a profundity of wisdom, if not of

knowledge. It can be said that they have deep insight into human nature. Still more, they have something to appreciate even after reading we can seldom find in any other writings. Some literary works of art, particularly some lyrics, are therefore suitable for memorisation and recitation. Students can thus understand and remember many beautiful phrases, rhythm and pitch in English, while they can practise pronunciation in so doing. In addition, we have criticisms of those works of literature to use for texts, if necessary. They are intellectually stimulating to some students, for many of them are highly philosophical. Students will thus deepen their understanding of their texts and their cultural background, while it is possible that they will get interested in literature and the English language in which it is written. In fact, I have met and taught a number of students for the last twenty-five years in many universities of various kinds who got interested in English for the first time, simply because they were introduced by me to good literary works of art.

II. Multi-Purposes

I am going to demonstrate how suitable a good literary work of art can be as a text in the university class. I happen to use *Alicia's Diary* by Thomas Hardy here for the demonstration. It is not only because the work is good but also because it is so popular in Japan, it is very often and widely used as a text. But in the present paper, simply for the lack of space, I shall use only the first two chapters

of that short story. Nevertheless those pages are sufficient for my purpose, while they indicate how much I usually go with my text in a period of 90-100 minutes.

(a) *Input*

(1) READING

There are three ways of reading: (i) Reading for Comprehension, (ii) Reading by Translation and (iii) Perusal or Attentive Reading.

(i) Reading for Comprehension

By this method students are supposed to read the text to understand the content. What is important, for them, is to read as fast, and comprehend as much, as they can. It is usual that most of the writings, even literary works of art, unless finished with surprise endings, may be comprehended in the half-way of reading. It is therefore necessary, for students, to be taught an efficient way of reading often called 'summary skills', 'cohesive devices' or even 'semantic markers'.

With *Alicia's Diary* as the text, it is enough, if your students can summarise the first chapter as much as follows:

*Mother and Caroline went to Versailles to meet the Marlets, though Alicia thinks she should have been for Caroline.

*Alicia's worry about Caroline, her sister of childlike simplicity and gentleness.

*Introduction of M. de la Feste, a talented landscape and marine painter--Alicia's wish to know what he looks like and how he is related to Caroline and Mother.

About the second chapter no more need be mentioned than the following:

*The announcement of an engagement between M. de la Feste and Caroline, as Alicia had suspected.

*Father's disagreement, if not objection, to the marriage which is retracted, when he has met him.

*A terrible letter that tells Mother's serious illness and Father's hasty departure for France--Alicia's worry about his night journey and wish for his arrival in time.

*A sad news from Father telling Mother's death and his promise with her to solemnise Caroline's marriage as soon as possible.

The key for a quick comprehension is how soon the reader can guess Caroline's engagement to M. de la Feste and Mother's death. If you follow the story with your students, you may make some suggestions for their quicker comprehension in the process of reading.

(ii) Reading by Translation

* Translation as a Means of Comprehension

Translation may be used in two ways. One of them is to use it as a means of comprehension. This is a popular method in Japan, but English and Japanese are so different in structure, any translation into Japanese, however good, is often felt as different from the original as English is from Japanese. Yet an interesting experiment may be made in translation, if it is used only for comprehension and not for translation as an art. It is an attempt to follow the author's way of thinking as much as we can in translation. Here is an example: (a) the translation I suggest to be attempted in the classroom, and (b) the popular translation, of the first four lines in *Alicia's Diary*.

(a) Watashi wa guru-guru to ie o meguri, i'shirenu kanashimi ni tsutsumarete imasu. To-iunowa dai-sukina imohto no Kyarolain ga kyo tabi ni haha to deta kara de, hutari ni wa koko suh-shuhkan wa aenai daroh to omou kara desu.

(b) Watashi wa iu-ni iwarenu sabishii kimochi de, ie no naka o aruki mawatte iru. Sore-to-iunomo, kyo, imohto no Kyarolain ga o-kah-san to dekakete shimai, suh-shuhkan mo aenai karada. (Translated by Professor Mamoru Ohsawa, one of the best-known Hardy scholars in Japan).

This method, if intentionally practised, will be useful also for hearing and composition. Once we have got used to the English way of thinking, both hearing and composition will be easier than when we are not.

* Drill in Translation

By this method, though seldom taught properly in Japanese universities today, we can train students for good translators. If it is merely to read English, as some people still think, that the majority of the Japanese study it, it will indeed have a great merit, if universities produce good translators in many fields. And it appears that this task is not very difficult for most universities in Japan without much improvement. In such a light, this method must be encouraged much more.

(iii) Perusal or Attentive Reading

This is the method commonest in English classes of most Japanese universities. This is why I will not waste much space to discuss the method except for its merit and demerit.

A merit of the method is that we can thus understand the content of the text well, even in detail, while we can often find some features peculiar to the author and even the English language in which s/he writes by comparison with the mother tongue. But the demerit of

the method, I am afraid, seems to surpass its merit and it is undeniably proved by the history of English education in Japan. It is that, in spite of the years of study, students never get better in hearing, speaking and writing English, because most of the time they think in, and speak, Japanese, though they may be under the illusion that they are studying English, as they are reading texts in English. It is not too much to say, therefore, that to this method of teaching and learning most of the evil of Japanese English education should be attributed.

(2) Grammar

It is no surprise that, however well it may be conducted, a class of grammar tends to be tedious. Yet, if taught practically in the context of reading rather than separately as grammar *per se*, grammatical questions may possibly be more interesting and demandable. And there seems to be two ways to be employed.

(i) Grammatical Questions by Teacher

One of the ways is that teacher will point out grammatical difficulties in the process of reading a literary work of art. It is because students cannot find grammatical questions worthy of attention in the context of reading. To save time and avoid them from being exposed to such embarrassment, teacher will point them out for them,

at least, until they have got used to the way in which they can find them by themselves.

(ii) Grammatical Questions by Students

Another way of dealing with grammatical questions is to ask students to point out his/her difficulties in reading the text. Many students want to ask grammatical questions, especially in the process of reading. They wish to understand what they cannot clearly, while they trust in no classmate for the answer. Even in the student-centred class, therefore, it is important, for the teacher, to be well aware that, if questioned and answered only among students, no questions of the kind they cannot answer will soon be raised, at least in the classroom. This is why I think it much better, even in the student-centred class, to ask students to raise questions as difficult as possible and make their teacher answer them. Students will learn as much as, or even more than, when they ask and answer questions among themselves, while they find some pleasure in trying to take advantage of, and teasing, the teacher.

The following are the grammatical difficulties the average Japanese students will have in reading *Alicia's Diary*. The difficulties under discussion and their answers are printed in bold type. The definitions are, unless otherwise specified, all quoted from *The Oxford English Dictionary*. The text used in the present

paper is the Macmillan Greenwood (Library) Edition and the story is included in *A changed Man* (1962).

CHAPTER ONE SHE MISSES HER SISTER

*luck has ... ordained that I should be the absent one (p. 87, l.17)

The past tense should with modal function. (22) In a noun-clause (normally introduced by *that*). (a) In dependence on expression of will, desire, command, advice, request.

*they will not effect much. (p. 88, l. 14)

The problem is whether effect is a transitive or an intransitive verb. If it is transitive, much is a noun, the object of effect, while it is an adverb modifying effect, if the verb is intransitive.

(1) *Trans.* To bring about (an event, a result); to accomplish (an intention, a desire).

Cf. (3) *absol. & intrans.* To have an effect, be effectual; to accomplish its purpose. *Obs.*

*I have not as yet learnt his age. (p. 88, l. 30)

It is difficult, for students, to distinguish as yet from yet, especially in the perfect tense. Some of them remember as yet as an idiom which means 'up to now' or 'until now'. But most of them do not know that as in this context has a restrictive force.

(VIII) *A limiting or restrictive particle.* (34) With adverbs and advb. phrases. (a) Of time: as then, as now, as to-day, as three

years ago, where *as* has a restrictive force. Still common dialectally; but literary English retains only *as yet* = up to this time, hitherto.

*From his nomadic habits I should say (p. 88, l. 34)

The past tense should with modal function. (19)(d) The original conditional notion is obscured in the phrases *It should seem; one should think* (now somewhat arch. and perh. sometimes interpreted [as] the statements of duty, obligation, or propriety. Similarly *I should think (suppose, etc.)* = 'I am inclined to think (suppose, etc.)'; also colloq. as a strong affirmation in reply to a tentative suggestion, e.g. 'I should (rather) think he *did* object'.

*what a very awkward, risky thing for her! (p. 89, l. 8)

adj. (7) Of things: Not easy to deal with; requiring cautious action; *euphemistic* for 'rather dangerous'.

*how jealously I would watch him (p. 89, l. 13)

adv. (1) Zealously, eagerly. *Obs.*

*her reiterated request that I would not miss a day (p. 89, l. 34)

The question would be why not 'should', though used in the noun-clause dependent upon the expression of request.

The past tense would with modal function. (46) In a noun-clause expressing the object of desire, advice, or request.

Usually with a person as subj., implying voluntary action as the desired end: thus distinguished from *should*, which may be used when the person's will is not in view. Also (almost always after *wish*) with a thing as subject, in which case *should* can never be substituted because it would suggest the idea of command or compulsion instead of mere desire.

*The image ... suffers from displacement. (p. 89, l. 39)

(3) Removal of a thing by substitution of something else in its place; 'replacement'.

*I should not know if she were dead or alive. (p. 90, l. 4)

Potential Subjunctive in Object Clause. 'In object clauses introduced by the ... indefinite *whether* or *if*, we sometimes still in choice prose and poetry employ the simple subjunctive, as in older English, to express the doubt in our mind, but in plain prose we now use the indicative.'

e.g. I sometimes wonder if it *be* (in plain prose *is*) understood in the United States.

'After a past tense we, of course, employ a past tense form of the subjunctive. This past subjunctive which results from attraction seems a little more common than the present subjunctive after a present indicative.'

e.g. Esther trembled like one grown suddenly old. She did not know whether it *were* (in plain prose *was*) with pleasure or fear.

(George O. Curme, *Syntax*, 44-II-3, p. 415)

(b) Output

Hitherto I have dealt with input. Now I shall go on to output to prove not only that my teaching method will also be applicable there as well as in input but also, thus, how multi-purposed it can be.

(3) COMPOSITION

For a composition class by the use of a literary work of art such as *Alicia's Diary* two ways may be employed. They are: (i) Essay Writing and (ii) Discussion or Questions & Answers.

(i) Essay Writing

The following may be the subjects suitable for Essay Writing by the use of *Alicia's Diary*:

- (1) What do you think of *Alicia's Diary*?
- (2) What would you do, if you were Alicia?
- (3) Do you think Charles de la Feste is more in love with Alicia, as she thinks he is, than with Caroline?
- (4) Is it really an accident that Charles was drowned to death?
- (5) What is your idea of sexual love? Discuss it in reference to *Alicia's Diary*.

(6) How do you evaluate *Alicia's Diary* in comparison with other works by Thomas Hardy?

(7) Can you discuss any other works of literature which deal with 'sacrificial love' in comparison with *Alicia's Diary*?

The last three subjects are more general and more suitable for Essay Writing. The method most practical in the classroom with those subjects will be that at the beginning of the semester the teacher will give them to students and correct their composition every week in part or in whole, so that each student may be ready to present the finished paper at the end of the semester to be marked. Of course, it is necessary, for the teacher, to evaluate students' papers, every time they are presented for correction.

(ii) Discussion (or Questions & Answers)

I hope it will soon be clear why I am using a set of terms in combination for the title of this section. There is no doubt that discussion in the target language, however poor, is a good method of language-learning, especially in the field of 'output', as students will learn not only how to use the language effectively and precisely but also how to think and debate in it. But it is difficult to keep discussion in the classroom excited and stimulating throughout a year, if you meet once a week regularly. This is why I should like to recommend you 'Questions and Answers' about the text for discussion,

until you face a certain subject which will press you to enter into discussion.

To conduct Questions & Answers effectively, there are again two ways: one is to ask all the questions from teacher. This method may be called Questions by Teacher to Students.

***Questions by Teacher to Students**

This method is excellent in three points. One is that it is time-saving. Teacher can ask his/her students those questions s/he has prepared in the way s/he likes. She can, for instance, proceed to next question, whenever s/he may find it fit and necessary. A second merit is that, as s/he provides questions specially for his/her class, the teacher can adjust the level of their difficulty to the attainment level of the class. With the same text, it is not necessary that the questions given in two different classrooms should be the same. A third merit is that those questions may be impartial, as expected to be, when provided by teacher. If students provide questions, it happens that some of them may be the same or similar and that no questions may be raised, for various reasons, about certain parts of the text. It follows that their questions are not purposeful, but fitful. So commendable as the present method may be, however, the less student-centred the class will be. And less improved will be the students in asking questions, though they may be able to answer better.

*Questions by Students to Students

Another method is to ask some students--I recommend five students every week--to prepare 3-5 questions for the next week and give those questions to their classmates in the classroom. The teacher will act no more than adviser. It is only when the question raised by one student is too ungrammatical or illogical to be comprehended by the majority of the students that the teacher will revise the question. Students will thus learn how to ask effectively and answer precisely. The variation of this method is that students will ask questions to their teacher to be answered, as in the case of grammatical questions.

*Questions by Students to Teacher

The merit of this method is that teacher can correct the questions raised by a student immediately, before s/he gives answers to them. It is said that this is the best method for composition. The teacher should correct the students, while they still remember where they are mistaken or clumsy.

The following are the questions and answers about the second chapter of *Alicia's Diary*.

CHAPTER TWO NEWS INTERESTING AND SERIOUS

August 5

(1) How was the announcement of the engagement between M. de la Feste and Caroline accepted by the people concerned?

It was accepted by M. de la Feste, Caroline, Mother and the Marlets as a happy and satisfactory arrangement, but by Father and Alicia quite dissatisfying, as they had not been consulted.

(2) Why should neither Father nor Alicia have been consulted about the engagement between M. de la Feste and Caroline, until it had come to the definite stage?

Although no reason may be mentioned explicitly, it is perhaps because both of them were more reasonable than the other and would give various reasons against the engagement.

(3) How did Father oppose the marriage (between M. de la Feste and Caroline)?

He wished that his son-in-law would not have been a Frenchman, but of English or other nationality.

(4) Comment on Alicia's concept of racial discrimination.

She was liberal and fair, because she said that 'the demarcations of races, kingdoms, and creeds, are wearing down every day, that patriotism is a sort of vice, and that the character of the individual is all [they] need think about' then.

August 7

(5) How can it be proved that the income of M. de la Feste seemed sufficient to keep the new couple alive?

It can be proved by the fact that Father 'did not settle something more on them'.

(6) What did Alicia want most of M. de la Feste?

It was the description of his personal appearance. 'Of engaging manner, attractive appearance, and virtuous character' were, to her, still too vague. She 'would rather have had one definite fact of complexion, voice, deed, or opinion'.

August 16

(7) Why did the marriage come to take place earlier?

Because Charles pleaded that their marriage might just as well take place earlier as scheduled.

(8) How did Caroline picture her marriage?

She pictured 'this romantic performance in the chancel of [their] old church, in which she [was] to be chief actor', as if a 'foreign gentleman [had] drop[ped] down like a god from the skies, [and] pick[ed] her up, and triumphantly carr[ied] her off'.

(9) What did Alicia want to do with M. de la Feste?

She was anxious to meet him for Caroline's sake and scrutinize him through and through to learn what the man was really made of.

August 20

(10) What announcement did Alicia get on the 20th August that threw Father and herself into deep trouble?

It was of Mother 'taken dangerously ill at Versailles', but they knew it was difficult to 'find some one who [would] do duty for him next Sunday' at such short notice.

(11) How did Father go to France?

He got 'the last train by which he [would] catch the midnight boat, and reach Havre some time in the morning'.

(12) Why was Alicia anxious about Father's journey to France?

Because he 'hate[d] the sea, and a night passage in particular'. In addition, the journey was such an errand and would be sad at best, while he was stay-at-home and unable to cope with any difficulty.

August 21

(13) Why was it hoped that Father would set out as soon as possible?

Because it was feared that Mother was sinking.

August 23

(14) What did a letter from Father tell Alicia?

It told her that, to their regret, Mother died, though he could hear 'from her own lips her strongly expressed wish that Caroline's marriage should be solemnised as soon as possible'.

(15) What did Alicia think of Father and Caroline, when she was told her mother's death?

She thought that it had become almost 'a scared duty of [her] father to accept [M. de la Feste] as a son-in-law without criticism', while Caroline must have been heart-broken, as 'she was always more [her] mother's pet' than she was.

Those questions may be given orally or in print. Answers may be required in both ways, too. The method I adopt is that, only when no answer returns, I shall ask the questioner to write his/her question on the blackboard to find out what is wrong with it. When the question is revised, answer will be made. It also appears to be of great help to some students, if the summary of the text is made in English before questions are given.

III. Conclusion

The method of teaching I have just introduced above as my own and favourite may be employed in any class of any department or course in Liberal Arts Training, as well as in Senior Classes of English Language and Literature, in the university. In addition, the method

covers, and is also applicable to, almost all kinds and levels of any language teaching and learning. Yet I am a professor of English in Japan and have applied it to the teaching of English for these last twenty-five years with such a success in it and gratitude from many students. This is why I call the method 'Multi-Purpose English Class'.